

Dancing in the Desert: A Case Study on the  
Digital Marketing Techniques of Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival

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ABSTRACT

DANCING IN THE DESERT: A CASE STUDY ON THE

DIGITAL MARKETING TECHNIQUES OF

COACHELLA VALLEY MUSIC AND ARTS FESTIVAL

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Digital marketing is a marketing strategy that helps companies grow in multiple ways. Digital marketing and the five Ds (digital devices, digital platforms, digital media, digital date, digital technology) represents the evolution of marketing in the modern era. The purpose of this study was to examine the digital marketing practices of Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. Coachella and its digital marketing techniques are strategically planned in order for the festival to reach its target audience. Research for this study was conducted using a case study. The results indicated that Coachella's digital marketing is effective in reaching the target audience and gains attention from all attendees. Coachella should continue utilizing its digital marketing techniques as well as additional marketing techniques to gain attention from attendees.

Keywords: Coachella, marketing, digital marketing, influencers, technology, music festival

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	1
Background of Study .....	1
Review of Literature .....	2
Purpose of the Study .....	7
Research Questions.....	7
Chapter 2 METHODS.....	9
Description of Organization.....	9
Description of Instrument .....	10
Description of Procedures.....	10
Chapter 3 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS.....	12
Digital Marketing Techniques .....	12
Influencer Marketing .....	13
Reaching Target Audience.....	14
Experiential and Traditional Marketing Techniques .....	15
Chapter 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	17
Discussions .....	17
Conclusions.....	20
Recommendations.....	21
REFERENCES .....	23

APPENDIXES .....	27
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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Background of Study

To be successful, it is extremely important for a company to participate in marketing efforts that allow them to stand out in an extraordinary way. In the modern era, digital marketing techniques that primarily focus on e-mail, content creation and social media are platforms companies are using to attract their target audience. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) state that the Five Ds of digital marketing include digital devices, digital platforms, digital media, digital data and digital technology. While the total figures are not yet known, digital ad spending was estimated to reach \$129.34 billion in 2019. (Enberg, 2019). As the rise of social media marketing and the use of different applications continues to grow, companies have to think of efforts that will inform, attract and build relationships with their target audience. The growing popularity of social media and how companies utilize these sources is one of the main ways people get informed about certain events, services, products, etc. Marketing is what creates word-of-mouth conversation that helps sellers gain more buyers (Evans, 2010). Depending on the type of marketing a company chooses to use, the effect of it can reach many people.

This modern technique of marketing is an extremely effective way to promote or bring in new customers or participants. Specifically, music festivals are beginning to grow, and the marketing practitioners behind the festivals must attract the audience over digital platforms. Music festivals bring people together by in person and online actions. The festivals connect one another and create lifelong memories for all. The efforts made

through the 5Ds of digital marketing is potentially what helps the festival be successful in all aspects. According to Hudson, Roth, Madden and Hudson (2015), “Through social media, marketers can gain rich, unmediated consumer insights, faster than ever before, and can foster loyalty through networking” (p. 69). Digital marketing efforts help create relationships with the attendees at music festivals. The purpose of this study was to examine the digital marketing practices of Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival.

### Review of Literature

Research for this review was conducted at Robert. E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, Google Scholar and Hospitality & Tourism Complete. This review of literature includes the following subsections: marketing, digital marketing, marketing of festivals, influencer marketing and social media/emotional impact at events.

Marketing is what helps companies inform consumers on who they are and what they represent. Marketers must carefully position and manage their brands in a powerful way (Armstrong, Kotler, Harker, & Brennan, 2018). The 4 Ps of marketing include product, price, place and promotion. Product is what people physically want to purchase, price involves asking for a price people are willing to pay, place is all about location and where you are and promotion is what people think regarding the product (Kingsnorth, 2019). Kingsnorth writes about the above-the-line and below-the-line techniques:

Above-the-line and below-the-line marketing are terms used to differentiate between broadcast and targeted marketing techniques. Above-the-line marketing refers to mass market advertising that is often used to push specific promotional

messages out to large audiences or to build your brand. Below-the-line is used to tailor your communications to individuals or segments to ensure a more powerful message. (p. 11)

Marketing is used in a variety of ways and the strategy behind it is what brings consumers in. Trusov, Bucklin and Pauwels (2009) stated, “Word-of-mouth strategies are appealing because they combine the prospect of overcoming consumer resistance with significantly lower costs and fast delivery- especially through technology” (p. 1). Therefore, the way companies choose to market their product and service is extremely important as it is a way to inform many people on what is being offered by the company.

Digital marketing has changed the way brands have communicated their event, product and/or service. Consumers now have an easier access to different types of entertainment, products, services and prices from a variety of companies which leads to an easier way to purchase products or services (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). This digital marketing strategy used by companies makes it more accessible for consumers to see and hear about the product or service as soon as it is announced. Ryan and Jones (2009) stated, “Innovative marketers jump in to explore ways that can harness the power of this emerging technology to connect with their target audience” (p. 5). The overall goal of providing content is to understand who a target audience is and what their likes and dislikes are. Content engagement allows the company to notice what content is providing the most engagement that supports conversion and lead to sales (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick). The content provided is what helps engage and inform the consumers and allow for potential purchasing of the product and/or service.

Marketing of a product, service or an event requires considerable amount of thought and detail. For a festival, the marketing is what informs the attendees on all the pre, during and post event information. The marketing is what potentially lures attendees in and increases the attendance at the specific event. Moufakkir and Pernecky (2015) stated, “The features-and-benefits approach views the social aspects of attendee experiences in terms of personal benefits and positive outcomes realized to customers through interactions with other customers” (p. 75). Marketing specialists can truly understand the target audience and market the festival to what they believe the attendees will focus on and be attracted to. The participants are observed at festivals and are understood by the observers regarding what is ‘happening’ to them within the live experiences as well as what they are doing while attending including their actions and behaviors (Mackellar, 2013). The behaviors that take place at festivals is what inspires the marketers on how they choose to market the festival. The way marketing is done within festivals is extremely important, as it creates a major impact on the attendees. Festival marketers should go beyond the typical customer- focused segmentation strategies relating to demographics, geographical features or self-reported expectations and instead should think of different segmentation strategies related to different social practices (Moufakkir & Pernecky). Moufakkir and Pernecky continue to state that explorations and detailed understandings of social practices within events and festivals help grow the engagement. This could lead to successful and useful interactions with customers. Social media plays a large role in this as it helps demonstrate what people want and what different people like and dislike. According to Abeza, O’Reilly & Reid (2013), “From a broad strategy perspective, social media meet relationship-marketing



goals when organizations use them to understand customer needs, increase their satisfaction, and enhance relationship value for customers” (p. 1). Managing the social media impact that the event has helps evaluate what needs to be done or what has to be done. Achen (2017) stated, “These attempts to measure the impacts of social media marketing can be used to build a model for empirical testing to determine if engagement on social media results in increased relationship quality, making platforms valuable relationship-marketing tools” (p. 43). The marketing strategies used at festivals and events are extremely important, as it can greatly increase the amount of people who attend or continue to attend the specific event.

When brands use influencer marketing to market either their product or service they are hoping to gain the attention of many customers. According to Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, Freberg (2010), “Social media influencers (SMIs) represent a new type of independent third party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweet, and the use of other social media” (para. 1). Influencers tend to be the face of the product or service that many people look to or follow. The influencers have a role that depends on their activity on the social network website (network size, membership duration, share of posts), brand message source (marketer-generated versus member-generated) and recipient type (SNS member versus nonmember). All of these are the result of an influencer’s post and both their decision to post and the customer’s decision to purchase (Chatterjee, 2011). The social media posts inform many people and become a platform for the specific brand or event they are focusing on. As Gillin (2018) stated, “Internet-based social media tools like blogs, podcasts, online video and social networks are giving

voice to the opinions of millions of consumers” (p. 1). Consumers are drawn to the postings and all that is shared.

Advertising is continuing to grow and the rise of influencers are increasing on a daily. In 2019, the world was projected to spend more than 700 billion dollars on advertising where two-thirds of this amount will be spent on digital advertising (Levin, 2019). Digital advertising is becoming more common as more people utilize online networks. Influencers have to strategically think about their posts to engage the audience and catch their attention. Booth and Matic (2011) stated, “Social media is about enabling conversations among your audience or market (p. 186). Consumers are the most important part of the brand, and the engagement they have with the product or service is what allows the company to continue to reach its audience.

Music festivals are a place where people go to make long lasting memories and to create experiences that they will remember forever. The experiences are what continues to bring people back. According to Smit and Meliseen (2018), “Experiences can be sold and that, more and more, consumers are looking for experiences instead of individual/separate products or services” (p. 14). Depending on the festival, there are different parts included that creates the experience for all. Getz (2007) stated, “It instills a high level of ‘communitas’; that is, a ‘temporary state in which people are together, removed from ordinary life’, so they have something very specific in common” (p. 36). Therefore, Music Festivals have to market the event in a variety of ways to reach the target audience. Hudson et al. (2015) stated, “Companies have generally embraced social media because of its potential for engagement and collaboration with consumers. Through social media, marketers can gain rich, unmediated consumer insights, faster than ever before,

and can foster loyalty through networking” (para. 11). Fifty-seven percent of sports and event venue managers have a social media strategy that results in higher revenues (Rothschild, 2011). Events and brands that utilize social media result in more sales and more people being informed of what is being offered. Cruz and Mendelsohn (2010) pointed out that more people are likely to purchase or tell others about a service if they follow a brand. Having a social media presence and following creates emotional connections between the company and the customers. If brands want to connect with their customers they need to have *Lovemarks* which are ‘super-evolved brands’ that increases connection between consumers and brands (Roberts, 2005). For festivals, the event managers have to be aware of who their target audiences are and what apps they use the most.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the digital marketing practices of Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival.

### Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What digital marketing platforms are being used?
2. What marketing efforts does the festivals take part in before, during and after the festival?
3. How effective are the certain marketing platforms in being successful for bringing in new and returning guests?

4. How effective are the efforts in order to attract the target audience?

## Chapter 2

### METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the digital marketing practices of Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. This chapter includes the following sections: description of organization, description of instrument, and description of procedures.

#### Description of Organization

A case study was conducted on the digital marketing techniques of Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. Coachella is an annual festival that takes place at the Empire Polo Club in Indio, California (Palm Springs, 2020). The festival has been around for 20 years beginning in 1999 consisting of three days and two weekends. Within the three days, multiple artists perform with genres consisting of indie, alternative, rap/hip hop, electronic, dance/house, rock, punk, pop and many more (Weiner, 2015).

Coachella's success continues to rise as they bring in top-name artists such as Beyoncé, Ariana Grande, Travis Scott and many more. The art aspect of the festival is another main attraction that interests people. Throughout the two weekends there are designers and visual artists that present their work all throughout the venue. Some of these art pieces include the balloon chain and do-lab (Coachella).

Paul Tollett and Rick Van Santen founded Coachella in 1999 and worked their way up. The festival was not a great success its first year in only having 25,000 tickets sold (Dambrosio, 2019). For this reason, it did not return in 2000, but since 2001 it has been a success for each of the last 20 years. The extremely popular festival brings in over

100,000 attendees each weekend. In 2017, \$114.6 million dollars was brought in from the festival itself (Pasarow, 2019). The three-day festival offers many different activities to continue the success and the growing rate of attendees.

### Description of Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was a case study guide developed by the researcher (see Appendix A). The guide was formulated into two main sections: organization notes and digital marketing. Included in the organization notes was mission of the organization, experiential marketing strategies and target audience. Included in the digital marketing was social media outlets used, email marketing, video advertising, mobile ads and influencer marketing.

A pilot study was conducted on SnowGlobe Music Festival, a well-known festival in Lake Tahoe. Once the pilot was completed, the researcher decided that the section “marketing” had to be more specific. Having many options for marketing can become too in depth. The researcher decided to be more specific and label it “marketing strategies.” In addition a decision was made to change the “influencer posts” to “influencer marketing” to develop a broader idea of what efforts are made in that area.

### Description of Procedures

A case study was conducted on the digital marketing techniques of Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. The instrument utilized in this study was a case study guide developed by the researcher. Research for this case study was conducted during a two-week period with various sources. The digital marketing strategies that Coachella

takes part in were found by utilizing the company's website and multiple third party websites. The Coachella website was used by the researcher to gather primary information about the festival. The following websites were also used to gain information about the marketing strategies and techniques used by Coachella: Freeman, *LA Times*, *New York Times*, Eventbrite, Netbase, Twitter, Mediakix, *Hollywood Reporter*, irisemedia, Eventmarketer, Instagram and Facebook. The third party sources were used to gain further information about the festival and the marketing strategies being employed.

## Chapter 3

### PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the digital marketing practices of Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. A case study was utilized to examine Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. This chapter includes the following sections: Digital marketing techniques, influencer marketing, reaching target audience, and experiential and traditional marketing techniques.

#### Digital Marketing Techniques

Coachella takes part in many marketing actions to enhance the involvement of the audience. Specifically, the festival focuses on their digital marketing efforts. The festival uses many platforms such as, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, the organization website and their own app. Using these platforms helps guide the target audience and allows them to stay connected before, during and after the event. Coachella primarily uses Instagram and Twitter for a majority of its marketing. The festival makes sure to communicate with the target audience at all times during the six-day festival. Before the event, Coachella makes sure to post Instagram posts prior to the event to inform guests on what will be at the festival and who will be attending. This helps the guests to continue being updated and informed on what to expect before the festival dates. During the event, there are several Instagram posts showing highlighted moments from the weekend and that certain day. This helps guests see what happened that day or the previous day. Not only does it interest the people attending and perhaps brings them



in the next day, but it shows non-attendees of what is happening in hopes of growing attendance the next year. Along with Instagram, the festival makes sure to post streams on Twitter every day of the event. They provide links to followers so that they can livestream acts from the comfort of their home. Once the event is over, there are recaps and posts to remind and inform their audience of what occurs and what is to come.

Focusing on Instagram, Coachella makes sure to fully utilize the platform and use it to its best ability. The festival makes sure to post stories of events, recaps of the festival, specific images of both celebrities and regular festival-goers with specific hashtags to document the events. With the large following of people that Coachella reaches this technique brings in a great amount of attendance, views and interest. The use of Instagram helps bring in new guests and continue to bring in the current attendees.

### Influencer Marketing

The digital marketing techniques used are highly focused on social media platforms to connect to the target audience. Coachella utilizes its platforms to inform and interest guests. Influencer marketing is rising as specific influencers use social media to allow for more information to be given and more people to follow and be aware of what is happening. Vanessa Hudgens who is known to be the “Queen of Coachella.” In 2019, she partnered with Amazon for the Amazon Locker location which gave attendees the option to ship essentials straight to the venue. Hudgens high following on Instagram has brought in many followers and her yearly posts at Coachella interests many people. A few other top influencers that bring awareness to the festival include, Hailey Bieber, Kendall Jenner and Jared Leto. Brands love the use of influencers as they market their

product while attending the extremely popular festival. Coachella makes sure to focus on their influencers and make sure they are posting on different platforms for many to see. Depending on what influencer is used, they attract the target audience. People become informed and interested because of the trust they have toward this individual.

### Reaching Target Audience

The efforts made by Coachella reach millions of people and attract a large audience. By doing so, it increases engagement and successfully reaches the target audience. On average, Coachella gets 43 million engagements, 14.3 million on average per day, 78.1 thousand per original post, 38.4 thousand comments, 614.3 thousand likes and 11.0 thousand dislikes. Large amounts of people see the posts and it reaches the target audience as soon as it is posted. Forty-five percent of festival-goers have discovered a festival through online advertisements while 54% have discovered festivals through radio or TV ads. Coachella takes part in these actions as a way to gain attention. The use of social media is effective for the festival as a way to increase engagement and reach the target audience. Artists also post details about the festival and where and when they will be performing. This not only brings in awareness but reminds attendees of the upcoming event. Coachella creates a year-round timeline to tease the target audience and share potential headliners. Most importantly, the use of live-stream and videos is what is extremely successful in reaching more people. In one specific year, the social reach of people who posted at the festival was over 239 million. Specifically, Coachella utilizes the hashtags #coachella, #coachellalive and #nochella to monitor engagement of

participants who could not attend. Not only does the festival specifically focus on their target audience at the festival but also makes sure to include non-attendees.

### Experiential and Traditional Marketing Techniques

Experiential marketing is what engages the audience and what allows the guests to be aware of certain aspects happening at the festival. Within experiential marketing, attendees are fully engaged and can experience the different parts of a brand or company. During Donald Glover's (Childish Gambino) set he gave certain attendees free pairs of his Donald Glover Adidas Nizza Line. This was done by Airdrop where people would accept and be given shoes. If accepted, the people had to wear the shoes all weekend. Hewlett-Packard (HP) electronics partakes in a major experiential campaign as they bring in the air conditioned Antarctic Dome. Overhead there are artistic projections that immerse attendees. This is all powered by HP and a way for guests to experience this engagement and see what HP can do.

Heineken creates a yearly experiential campaign each weekend at the festival. "The Heineken House" includes a specific lineup just for this stage and allows for guests 21+ to experience this while being at Coachella. This location allows for attendees to relax and recharge. There is also a hashtag for this location as this reaches more people who may want to attend the next day. This experience brings in around 10,000 people a day. Included is a dance floor with a mural available to take pictures in front of. The goal of this activation is for guests to relax and purchase a cold glass of Heineken beer. The use of social media and the posts added within the house informs others and shows others what they might be missing out on.

Throughout the three-day festival, multiple brands take part in activations that attendees can go to throughout the day. The brands and their activations include, NYX Professional Makeup Glitter Trip which is 12pm- 7pm where people can enter the pop up and get their glitter touched up and take a picture while attending, Revolve Festival which has its own private performances and location but is for attendees of Coachella and many more. These activations provide for more experiences to occur during the weekend of the festival and for more posts to be posted on social media. This allows for more people to be aware of these brands and what is occurring at the festival.

## Chapter 4

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival takes part in a large amount of marketing techniques focusing on digital marketing to reach its target audience. This concluding chapter includes the following: a discussion of the findings, limitations of the research, conclusions based on research questions, and recommendations for the future.

#### Discussion

The marketing platforms used by Coachella are successful in bringing in new and returning guests. The researcher found that the social media platforms that are utilized the most include: YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and their mobile application. Using these applications help Coachella be able to market certain parts and allow for there to be a relationship between attendees and the festival itself. Hudson et al., (2015) stated that companies have begun to embrace social media due to its potential for engagement and connection with their consumers. The successful use of Instagram postings helps Coachella bring in new and returning guests to the festival. The use of Instagram helps bring awareness to both attendees and non-attendees. This provides awareness for all as it focuses on engagement between the festival and the individuals interested in following the daily posts. Digital marketing platforms that are used keep the attendees informed and updated on the current events happening at the festival. Coachella should continue to post on the platforms as it successfully creates engagement and connection between attendees and the festival. Throughout the event, the festival should enforce the use of hashtags to

use on social media. Doing this will help show people who could not attend what is occurring and who is performing.

In order to inform their audience, Coachella focuses on multiple aspects to perform its goal. The researcher found that the festival does a successful job at using influencers to inform the audience. Using influencers helps contribute to the overall attention of the festival and creating word of mouth to occur. Rather than just focusing on the social media aspect and the digital marketing techniques, influencers post specific posts to show their followers where they are during the festival or what they purchased. This is essential for Coachella as it helps word of mouth to occur and for many people to follow what is going on. Since Coachella is widely known for its social media presence, having influencers post about the festival is an extremely successful way to market certain aspects. The use of influencers demonstrates that the festival is aware of the social practices and the interests of the guests. Moufakkir and Perneky (2015) state that having a detailed understanding of social practices within events and festivals help grow the engagement. The use of social media and the impact of influencers utilizing this platform is an extremely successful tactic that Coachella is focusing on. The influencers should be given their own hashtag to use on social media so that is easy for attendees to find this influencer without having to search for a long period of time. The festival should continue utilizing influencers and encouraging them to post on the variety of platforms. This helps gain awareness and engage the attendees and brings in new and returning guests.

Coachella successfully reaches its target audience as they strategically understand the actions that are to be used in the process. Ryan and Jones (2009) stated that marketers

explore ways that emerging technology can connect with the target market. As for social media, the strategies used within are effective as it reaches the audience. The live streams and the daily posts make sure to focus entirely on the audience and all of the people interested in the events taking place. Coachella successfully reaches its target audience as they strategically understand the steps needed to be used. As for social media, the strategies used within are effective as it reaches potential new and returning attendees. Using the successful techniques on social media allows for word of mouth to occur and for more people to hear about certain parts. Due to the social media use and the effectiveness of it, more people have been informed which lead to more purchases the current and previous year. The festival being advertised by certain artists creates awareness for many. This reaches the target audience in a variety of ways and helps the festival have more attention. The engagement of social media and the posts made before, during and after the event is what successfully allows Coachella to reach its target audience. Coachella should continue posting social media posts throughout the event, prior to the event and once the event is completed. For this to happen, the organization has to stay up to date with current trends that the target market is utilizing. It is important for brands to find new and interactive ways to communicate and engage with their audience. Coachella is successfully in doing so as the festival continues to find ways to reach its target audience.

There were several limitations involved within the research of this study. Having found all the information on online resources could potentially create bias as this is the only information available. There could be a range of new or different information that was not openly available online. Another limitation involved could be that the researcher

is a strong follower of influencers and festivals on social media platforms. This could have an impact on the research as certain information was already known to the researcher. Having had a strong interest in both, influencers and festivals social media platforms this could have blocked new information from coming in as the researcher already had previous knowledge. Lastly, the researcher has attended Coachella in the past. This could create a bias as the researcher has seen first-hand how Coachella markets the festival. From previous experience, the researcher has seen what the festival does to inform the audience. These limitations could have created bias however, the researcher made sure to thoroughly research new information and focus entirely on the marketing efforts done by Coachella to reach its target audience.

The results and information founded by the researcher demonstrate the digital marketing techniques used by Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. As current trends change as time goes on Coachella will have to continue finding ways to reach its target audience. Coachella is successfully using different platforms to inform and attract new and returning guests. Digital marketing and the use of influencers to market festivals is beneficial to an event like this. People continuously use social media and follow certain influencers to be informed on what is taking place and who is attending.

## Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Coachella uses Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and their mobile application to reach their audience.



2. Before the event, the festival posts updated news about the festival, during the event they post daily clips of the day and after the event they update the audience on what is occurring and when they can purchase the next year's ticket.
3. The marketing platforms are extremely effective in bringing in new and returning guests as it creates for word-of mouth to occur and for more people to post and share what was shown.
4. The strategies used to attract the target audience are highly effective as the use of social media, influencers, experiential marketing attracts and interest's guests.

### Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Coachella should continue utilizing the social media platforms and influencers as way to attract the audience and inform people on what is happening before, during and after the event.
2. Coachella should continuously stay updated with current trends in order to stay up to date with what the target market is utilizing.
3. During the event, the festival should enforce the use of the hashtags recommended on social media.
4. Influencers should be given their own hashtag on their posts to allow for people to directly go to this certain hashtag to see who may be attending and who is performing.

5. For future researchers, there should be a comparative analysis between Coachella and another popular festival to see what actions are similar and/or different.

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## APPENDIXES

## Appendix A

### Instrument



## INSTRUMENT

<b>Organization Notes</b>	
Mission	
Experiential	
Marketing strategies	
Target audience	
<b>Digital Marketing Notes</b>	
Social media outlets	
Email marketing	
Video advertising	
Mobile ads	
Influencer marketing	